

# BRICUP Newsletter 93

BRICUP

British Committee for the  
Universities of Palestine

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### **Thoughts on Culture for Co-Existence**

*Diana Neslen*

After the call in February 2015 by over 700 artists for a cultural boycott of Israel, it was inevitable that Israel and its unwavering supporters would respond. The response finally came on 21<sup>st</sup> October. Instead of a galaxy of artistic support for their effort to ‘build bridges’, it was something of a damp squib.

While denying that the original boycott letter accurately represents opinion in the UK cultural world, it was surprising how few cultural representatives were recruited. While some stellar names chose to jump on to this stationary train, the list is rather short on public artists. It is long, of course, on diehard Zionist supporters, many of them either British or Israeli Jews, some of them politicians and sadly a few misguided, principled opponents of Israel’s oppressive regime.

The stated purpose of this venture is to launch what the promoters call a Culture for Coexistence ‘to inform and encourage dialogue about Israel and the Palestinians in the wider cultural and creative community’. It is interesting therefore that no Palestinians are signatories, even though there are many Palestinian cultural representatives in the UK. So the dialogue sounds a bit like a monologue to me unless it is, as the letter states, about Israel while generously allowing the Palestinians to have a walk on part.

We are treated to the tired old argument that cultural boycotts ‘single out Israel’. In fact the very same people complaining of ‘singling out Israel’ remain deathly quiet when Israel is singled

out for special dispensation regardless of its violations of international law.

They are concerned that cultural boycotts are 'divisive and discriminatory'. It is surprising therefore that the promoters have nothing to say about the divisive and discriminatory practices indulged in by Israel against the Palestinians. There is the ransacking of the Sakakini Centre in Ramallah with the destruction of priceless manuscripts. In 2009 the Israeli regime in Jerusalem, angered by the designation of Jerusalem as Capital of Arab Culture, banned all displays of culture and broke up cultural gatherings, arresting organisers. Even children are not immune. In 2013 they blocked a theatre festival for children in East Jerusalem. And of course the siege of Gaza prevents the importation of books.

Under this occupation Israel indulges its pettiness and supremacy through an orgy of destruction: gone are studios, musical instruments, cameras, artefacts. And of course the system of permits, walls and checkpoints prevents orchestras from functioning, artists from meeting and the artistic freedom to explore that this letter so eloquently describes.

Had the promoters really been interested in the free transmission of culture, they would have come out forcibly to say that Palestinians need 'culture not sanctions'. But they remained silent, even though they have leverage with respect to Israel.

Indeed some of those so antagonistic to boycotts and so much in favour of 'co-existence' are old enough to remember the disruption and boycott of Soviet culture by Zionists in order to 'let my people go' (to Israel). Some of the signatories to the letter doubtless supported cultural boycotts then, and by their antagonism now to boycotts, expose themselves as hypocrites

The letter puts forward an alternative to boycott, namely the warm cuddly alternative of dialogue which will in their view promote understanding and acceptance leading to a resolution of the conflict. This seems elegant on the page but the reality is far more savage. Their touching faith in the bona fides of the powerful has not in the 48 years of occupation been realised. Indeed although the Palestinians have made all the concessions, Israel like a juggernaut has ploughed on with occupation sublimely unwilling even to grant anything approaching equality to the Palestinians. All that dialogue does is to allow the supremacists even more opportunity to

subjugate their captive population, while retaining the support of naïve signatories.

The authors of this letter say they are in favour of a two state solution. However they seem unaware that while they may pay lip service to this mantra, the Israeli government has made it quite clear that there is no turning back from a one state solution, a one state that denies Palestinians rights. The settlers are now the masters of all they survey.

For 48 years negotiations have taken place. For 48 years the world has engaged in dialogue, while building bridges with Israel and turning a blind eye to Palestinian dispossession. The overall effect has been to allow Israel to impose a stranglehold on the occupied Palestinian territories expropriating land and water for exclusive Jewish Israeli use, illegally settling Jewish Israelis in occupied territory, building walls and watchtowers, imprisoning Palestinian political leaders, destroying olive fields and indulging the most violent of settlers, many of whom are migrants from abroad. Dialogue and bridge building does not have a good pedigree. In fact it can be said that it has comprehensively failed.

The response to this letter has been electric. JK Rowling's name on the list had a profound impact on many people. Here is a writer who has articulated in her many works the pain of oppression, who seemingly understands discrimination. So people felt moved to inform her of the nature of Israel's belligerent occupation, which has made the Israeli state the target of a boycott.

I have ever felt awed by the touching faith so many have in the power of facts to influence the opinions of those who have chosen to follow the 'Friends of Israel'. But knowledge of the facts has not influenced the opinion makers in the mainstream media. The mainstream media, like the BBC and even now the [Guardian](#) have all the facts at their disposal and yet remain silent about the daily violence perpetrated against Palestinians and only react when the Palestinians under ongoing pressure, resist. Then it becomes violence but only violence against Israelis. Israeli violence against Palestinians is understood as a 'security' response. And they blame social media, not Israeli ongoing oppression for Palestinian responses.

The same could be said of some of the people moved to sign the Culture for Co-Existence letter.

[Moris Farhi](#), for instance has itemised with remarkable clarity and passion his disillusion with the Israel he once loved so unconditionally. Sadly, knowledge of the nature of the beast does not necessarily commit to action against it and even knowledge itself has limitations. So, something else must be at work.

The fundamental mistake made by so many writers is the belief in shared values. Scrutiny of Ms Rowling's letter might be a useful corrective. It seems as if the real concern of Ms Rowling and of those misguided enough to support the sentiments of this letter, is the well being of Jewish Israelis. It is very clear that Ms Rowling's heart lies with Israeli Jews when she talks about 'the ordinary Israelis... who have a right to ask why...North Korea and Zimbabwe.. are not boycotted'. (She seems blissfully unaware of the international boycotts targeting both those toxic countries) In her view only the concerns of those who live in privileged seclusion from the hell of occupation are worthy of consideration and even then she is so inured against the arguments of the boycotters that she is unaware that it is institutional support from the Israeli state that is the target, not individuals.

Fundamentally Rowling and her ilk seem bereft of the values so many would like to attribute to them. Instead they seek to promote the values of ethnic privilege, which makes them deaf to the cries of the oppressed. So any argument about Israel's crimes leaves no stain on their conscience. Rather our very anxiety to inform them simply gives them the opportunity to vindicate their position, as Ms Rowling has just done.

Once we recognise the reality of the mindset of Israel's supporters. we will hopefully stop wasting time trying to convince them of their folly and instead confront them with the evidence of their belief system which can only be called racist.

Rowling promotes culture as a civilising mission. It brought back memories of the late great anti Apartheid activist, Ronald Segal who answered a challenge about the 'uncivilised' Africans by telling the questioner that the most civilised country in Europe, the one that had produced Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven and Bach is also the country that gave us the gas chambers and the Nazi war machine. Culture of itself cannot be civilising. It is indeed the use we all make of culture that is important and by that token, many

of the signatories, including Rowling have a long way yet to go.

It is difficult to understand why this Culture for Coexistence should succeed now, when the evidence for its success is not sustainable. But perhaps there is another reason for this initiative and that is that the authors of this letter are acting in the service of not of 'bridge building' as they proclaim, but rather in the service of the Israeli state, contemptuous as they are of Palestinian opinion and pain, and offering a shield to get Israel off an uncomfortable hook. This way Israel can be prevented from being held accountable for its egregious actions, while undermining the boycott, one of the few non-violent options that has shown some sign of impacting the rhinoceros hide of Israeli policy makers and politicians.

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## **Beyond mere veneer: neoliberalism and Zionism in Israeli academia**

*Hilla Dayan*

*Author's note: The following is the text of a lecture I gave at a SOAS conference in October. I thank the organizers for inviting me.*

I am sure most of us can agree that we are meeting in the shadow of multiple crises, in Europe, in Israel/Palestine, and in academia. I don't think anyone here is not institutionally complicit with the refugee crisis or the Greek crisis, with the Israeli occupation and violence, and with neoliberal academia. Whether critical of it or not we subscribe to academic institutions that are by and large conservative, undemocratic, self-perpetuating, exclusionary to people of color, indifferent to the stateless, subservient to ruling elites, and servicing corporate-military interests and complexes. This list is far from exhaustive but will serve to situate Israeli academia in the global academic context. The focus of my talk is nevertheless the Israeli academia and the co-hegemonies of Zionism and neoliberal rationality. Clearly the occupation shapes Israeli academia in many ways, which are difficult to put in a snappy, straightforward manner. But my intention is not so much to theorize or pathologize Israeli academia as an exception because of the occupation, but to address the relationship

between academia and Israeli society. It is probably clear to most of you that in Israel, neoliberal rationality enfolds in an already frighteningly shrunk liberal space under unprecedented government assault in recent years. The neoliberalization of education in particular, as Yossi Yona and Yossi Dahan once argued, produces subjects that are “better citizens,” that is, more loyal to the state and its market logic than ever before. This goes to show that presenting Israeli academia as mere veneer, falsely advertising Israel as a liberal state, entirely misses the point. Academia is a domain reflecting most clearly the demise of liberalism, and the social impact of academia cannot be simplistically reduced to its usefulness for *hasbara*. I am going to develop next three main contentions: 1. that academia turns its back to society; 2. that it has significant social and political impact, and 3. that because of 1 and 2 it should not be abandoned as a critical domain for our struggle for democracy.

Historically a pre-state Zionist institution, academia was from the outset harnessed to the goals of the national movement by Zionist Ashkenazi elites. This core orientation and the demographic makeup of the Israeli academic elite have not changed substantially for decades that followed the establishment of the state. Uri Ram has written expertly on the genealogy of disciplines in academia, and the impact of globalization on the production of knowledge in Israel. My lay understanding of what began in the 1990s as an accelerated opening up of the educational market and the overall impact of the college boom is very limited. What seems beyond dispute is: 1. the creation of a two-tiered system and multiple trajectories for education had channeled a growing demand for higher education into professions useful for capital such as management, accounting and lawyering. 2. Inequality in education grew. Even as the student population swelled and the number of degrees conferred sky-rocketed, inequality in education did not level up. Yes, many more Palestinians obtain university degrees but their presence in Israeli academia is still an anomaly. The number of Palestinian and Mizrahi faculty is still statistically negligible. Gaps between Israeli-Jews along ethnic lines have been consistent over decades. Although subject to controversy, some suggest they deepen, especially the educational gaps between third generation Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. Unemployment rates are significantly high for the educated Palestinian

middle-class. Poor populations are channeled into separate, inferior education streams. Bedouins, orthodox Jews and citizens of Ethiopian descent, for instance, are virtually excluded from higher education. The massive underclass of asylum seekers and migrant workers is not supposed to study at all. One can speak of Israel’s university education as the end-point of segregation, exclusion and denial of education. One cannot say that academia merely reflects a racial order. It is also doing the ordering.

Paradoxically, rather than democratizing higher education, the commodification and technocratization of education accelerated the drift away from society and further in the direction of power: from Ivory tower to Ivory power. The drift in the direction of power paradoxically triggers a crisis of public relevance – what is the university good for? The more academia is becoming increasingly untenable and obsolete – untenable as vocation and obsolete as a domain where rival contestations over society take place – the more pressing is this question. This crisis is deeply felt, especially in the critical disciplines but not only. In the Israeli context specifically, we have to ask who can afford the increasingly absurd aspiration for an academic career, and at what cost, personal and social. As Michel Feher urges us to consider, in the neoliberal condition our subjective disposition is of portfolio managers: our greatest asset is credit, we must attract investors (grants) and convince everyone to have confidence in our speculated chance to succeed in the academic market. When I say neoliberal it is in that deeper subjective and anti-social sense.

Having argued that academia is increasingly obsolete and in the neoliberal epoch also increasingly demanding from academics indifference to society, I now want to describe some of its social effects. Take for example the stiff competition between academic institutions located in Israel’s periphery to attract “strong” students and faculty from the affluent center. Faculty and students from the center are induced to relocate to the Negev, where they can “strengthen” already wealthy and ethnically segregated Jewish neighborhoods and settlements. Academia is not responsible for decades-long neglect of the so-called “periphery” or for massive land dispossession and expulsions amounting to domestic ethnic cleansing of the

Bedouins in the Negev. This is a government policy. Yet, in pursuit of self-interest it contributes its fair share to neglect and dispossession. Operating under a similar premise Tel Aviv University divulges subsidies for students to rent housing in Tel Aviv's poor neighborhoods, particularly those adjacent to its plush "heart." In administering this populist financial aid scheme, TAU furthers government pressures put on refugees under the permanent threat of expulsion. It also serves the interests of developers to dispossess the original Mizrahi populations through aggressive forms of gentrification.

I now want to link this to the rather well known and substantial ties between Israeli academia and the military. Once again, to attribute it to the lack of separation between academia and the state, to a shared Zionist orientation would be to state the obvious. It is also and obviously business relations. Whereas measures to encourage the economically disadvantaged or Israel's poor, if at all, are left to the discretion of individual departments and colleges, the IDF, a sector of society already well endowed with generous salaries and pensions, is institutionally privileged because it is lucrative for academia to generate special programs and fast tracks to degrees for military personnel. Ben Gurion University, for instance, will probably become financially solvent by providing services to Ir Habahadim, a massive installation of military schools built in its vicinity. Yet, this utilitarian explanation is insufficient. If we want to consider the evolution of the relations between academia and the military in terms of the neoliberal revolution we can approach service to the military rather as generating credit for academia from the new elites of the "start up nation," the to-be-rulers. Perhaps no other term than "start up nation" captures more succinctly the spirit of Zionism in the age of neoliberalism. It is the valorization as an expression of patriotism of private profiteering from occupation expertise; the occupation is the only venture from which there is no exit. No other figure of speech and no other figure personifies it better than the current minister of education Naftali Bennet, leader of the settler ruling party Habayit Hayehudi, the former IT magnet, who happens to reside in the rich coastal town of Raanana.

What the few examples I provided demonstrate is that academia's social effects cannot be delinked

from its more direct contribution to the normalization and permanence of the occupation, with the most obvious example being the acceptance to its midst of the settlement "university" of Ariel. Normally, Israeli academics rarely make public interventions that directly support the occupation. In an exceptional press conference, ethics experts argued recently for legalizing the forced feeding of a Palestinian hunger striker, Muhammad Allan, against the notable objection of the Israeli medical association ("a Philosophical emergency decree"). Of a different magnitude of complicity altogether is the more systematic and longstanding involvement of an entire discipline, Israeli Archeology, in land grab and Jewish settlement, particularly in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank. So much so that the state refused to reveal in court the identity of archeologists active in the OPT and their digging sites, citing the necessity to protect them from international boycott. Academia is, needless to say, indifferent to the bombing of school buildings in Gaza, the denial of freedom of movement that debilitates Palestinian educational institutions, administrative arrests of Palestinian academics, and regular army incursion into campuses. In June this year, in the midst of public uproar and a media frenzy portraying the BDS movement as Israel's top "strategic threat," heads of universities stalked the nationalist flames in an emergency visit to Israel's president to express their concern with the academic boycott without raising the slightest concern with the goings-on in the OPT. It makes perfect sense that academic institutions are concerned with their international standing. But the visit to the president demonstrated not just academia's consistent hypocritical denial of its complicity with the occupation, but also its pursuit of narrow self-interest and inability to prioritize as a national agenda what is by far more threatening to society and the future of academia itself than any current boycott campaign – the demise of public education which is not market or technologically driven and extreme inequality.

We can end the story right here, simply dismissing Israeli academia as a culprit, but as Anat Matar brilliantly reminds us, the entrenched conservatism of academia as a historical institution is not a given. Its subservience to rule of whatever type is a political project and must be regarded as such. In the rest of the time, I would like to shortly address this political project in some more detail and contextualize it. In

hindsight it is interesting to pay attention to the period before Zionism neoliberalized. My hunch is that the neoliberal revolution at first triggered a legitimation crisis for Zionism until it managed to recuperate and adapt. During the 1990s de-Zionification emerged as a horizon or a possibility, however circumscribed. The pioneers within the critical disciplines of the humanities and social science in academia instigated an epistemological unraveling. Resistance to Zionism existed of course from the outset of the movement, but it is my impression that because academia is not separated from the state, resistance from within academia generated respectability and cultural weight to dissent, which was initially very significant. I believed as a student at the time that it is bound to lead in one direction to a point of no return. The intellectual and academic milieu of the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow totally blew my mind. This is what academia meant for me personally when I began the journey up to the moment of unraveling. One is not born but becomes non-Zionist. This leap is huge and too daunting to formulate here. It turned out however that on all fronts – academia, Mizrahi and anti-occupation politics – whatever opening existed in contestation over social significations and social meanings was crushed with the closing of the decade. It was possible to put the Ginny back in the bottle. Israeli academia managed to contain, to control, to redirect and quite possibly strangle to death the epistemological revolution and what I would like to propose without theorizing it any further is that this had everything to do with the reactionary counter-revolution of Neozionism.

New generations of critical scholars today operate under much more restrictive conditions politically and epistemologically than those of my generation and certainly of the generation of the pioneers. Under the rule of settler elites that are thoroughly neoliberal and have all the intentions of shaping academia (as other domains) in their own image the long vilified “anti-Zionists” in academia are currently subject to the permanent threat of expulsion with extreme political prejudice. This is generally speaking a silent purge, highly individualized, aided by the managerial depravities of academia and by the backwind of populist anti-intellectual contempt, which tragically is shared by a new generation of Mizrahi activists. The academic left is dismissed as self-serving, socially parasitic, disloyal, and indifferent to society. Sad to say, the accusations

tend to be true. The irony is of course that populist attacks on the academic left in the name of neozionist revolutionaries emanate from and are sponsored from above, ensuring thus that the elimination of the old guards of leftism in academia will leave the university in its current form completely intact – complicit with the occupation, socially exclusionary and neoliberal. This is the political project currently underway and that is why those who manage to survive within Israeli academia and are not forced into exile are understandably busy with survival.

Yet the state of indignant withdrawal from public space just confirms ultimately our entrenched complicity with neoliberal academia and with social and political injustice. The problem is not that there are no critical voices or critical studies produced in Israel, to be sure there are. The problem is that academia as a domain for a counter-hegemonic struggle was abandoned with grave social consequences. This abandonment, and I have to qualify what I have to say now by underlining my relatively secure position as an insider-outsider, seems to me ultimately short sighted and self-defeating, a pervasive expression of nihilistic despair from Israeli society. There is enough cynicism and disillusion with academia all around, but at this point I believe it is too rash and early to declare it hopeless. We academics began to understand the way we sustain the empty edifices of our neoliberal institutions, and what that means is that we are in a unique position to have the privilege and the power to collapse and rebuild it anew. Ernesto Laclau said that the greatest challenge is not only to defend our own autonomy from hegemony. Laclau’s luminary guidance is that we must advance in the direction of autonomy and hegemony in the struggle for democracy. In the context of Israeli academia we have a strong case to make linking academia’s contribution to social injustices and the occupation. It is in that spirit that we have launched a new initiative, the members-based association Academia for equality that is currently under construction and calls on anyone with links to Israeli academia or in exile from it to join. The idea is to solidify an inclusive and accommodating of antagonisms bloc to tackle all the issues – complicity with the occupation, inequality and exclusion, persecution of critical academics, the neoliberal academic culture. My motivation to pursue this, as a leftie in exile, is to cultivate hope for the society that has made me the academic that I am, to pay back my debt. I

still operate as if I am a manager of my academic life/portfolio, but I accept that such an impoverished, lone existence has a larger meaning than simply shaping my personal experience and conduct. Academia, to conclude, should not be abandoned as a domain for our common struggle in the name of society and for the society of the future in a democratic, post-neoliberal Israel/Palestine.

*Dr Hilla Dayan is a Lecturer at Amsterdam University College. The title of the conference was **Settlers and Citizens: a critical view of Israeli Society.***

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## **Support for the Palestinian right to education.**

*A declaration by members of staff and students at Sheffield Hallam University: 12th October 2015*

Over the last ten days we have seen increasing levels of military action by the Israeli Defence Force in the West Bank. As Palestinians throw stones in protest at the ongoing military occupation of their land, Israeli forces respond with live fire. Since the 1st October, 1300 Palestinians have been injured with live or rubber coated bullets. (1)

On the 7th October 2015, the University of Birzeit (the oldest and most prestigious University in the West Bank) organised a peaceful protest against Israel's escalating aggression. During the protest, two Palestinian students were arrested for taking part. Video footage shows undercover Israeli police and Israeli soldiers brutally attacking the students. (2) *Abdul Rahman Abu Dahab and Ahmed Walid Hamid* were beaten viciously while being arrested and then dragged to military vehicles. A weapon appeared to be discharged at close range into the thigh of another student. The students were then handcuffed and left lying injured in the street until they were roughly taken away by the military. They join the hundreds of University students already held in Israeli military detention facilities without trial and with no knowledge of the duration of their incarceration (3)

The University of Birzeit has called for academic institutions around the world to speak out against

these violations of the right to education, a right guaranteed in international law. We believe that it is our moral responsibility to stand alongside Palestinian students and teachers in defence of this right.

As staff and students at Sheffield Hallam University, we therefore declare our support for the Birzeit University campaign for the freedom of their students and against acts of violence carried out on university students by an occupying force.

We invite all colleagues and students to join us in this act of solidarity.

Signed

Dr Ruth Barley, Department of Psychology, Sociology and Politics

Dr Alice Bell, Department of Humanities

Dr Sam Browse, Department of Humanities

Dr Sophie Bush, Department of Humanities

Dr Rinella Cere, Department of Media Arts and Communication

Annaliese Connolly, Department of Humanities

Dr Claire Drewery, Department of Humanities

Hassun El Zafar, Students' Union Education Officer

Jonathan Feldman, Sheffield Hallam University

Jenny Fortune, Department of Natural and Built Environment

Bob Freeborn, Department of Humanities

Dr Karen Grainger, Department of Humanities

Professor Julia Hirst, Department of Psychology, Sociology and Politics

Dr Anne Hollows, Department of Social Work, Social Care and Community Studies and Sheffield Palestine Education Network

Colin Jackson, Institute of Education

Dr Russell Jackson, Department of Media Arts and Communication

Andrew Jeffrey, Department of Humanities

Dr Peter E Jones, Department of Humanities and Sheffield Palestine Education Network

Allie Kinneavy, Department of Humanities

Dr Sharon Kivland, Reader in Fine Art

Dr Barbara MacMahon, Department of Humanities

Angela Martin

Dr Sue McPherson, Department of Humanities

Simon Nolan, Department of Humanities

Professor Sara Mills, Department of Humanities

Dr David Peplow, Department of Humanities

Dr Nick Pollard, Occupational Therapy

Professor Hilary Povey, Mathematics Education Centre

Anandi Ramamurthy, Department of Media Arts and Communication

Dr Phil Roddis

Dr Ana Maria Sanchez-Arce, Department of Humanities

Kevin Taylor, Department of Engineering and Maths

Dr Brian Tweedale, Department of Media Arts and Communication

Dr Susan Walsh, Department of Allied Health Professions (Occupational Therapy) and Sheffield Palestine Education Network.

Dr Isabelle van der Bom, Department of Humanities

Dr Kate Wilkinson, Department of Humanities

Brendan Wood, Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Work, Social Care and Community Studies,

Dr Richard Wood, Department of Humanities

## Notes

- (1) Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health figures
- (2) <http://www.birzeit.edu/news/birzeit-university-appeals-academic-and-human-rights-institutions-speak-out-against-crimes-isra>
- (3) Defense for Children International (2015): [http://www.dci-palestine.org/issues\\_military\\_detention](http://www.dci-palestine.org/issues_military_detention)

## **‘Civility’, Zionism and the hostile corporate takeover of scholarly communities.**

**A review of Steven Salaita’s book - *Uncivil Rites: Palestine and the limits of academic freedom*, published by Haymarket books , Chicago, Illinois, pp 243.**

### ***Jake Lynch***

*Uncivil Rites* is an uplifting, uneven, fizzing celebration of the struggle for humanity in the face of an unholy alliance between Zionism, the hostile corporate takeover of scholarly communities that has corrupted University administration, and the militarism that seeks to quell resistance to injustice. By turns angry, funny, maudlin, defensive, militant and ultimately affirmatory, the book never lapses into either of the two signature modes that pro-Israel propaganda shares with ethnocentric American ‘patriotism’, namely rage and hate.

Salaita was born in West Virginia to a Jordanian father, and married into a Palestinian family. At the outset of the book, he remarks on the subject of his PhD thesis, “on interrelated discourses of colonization in North America and Palestine” (p. 1). In 2013, he was appointed to a Professorial post in the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) – only to have it withdrawn, the following year and before taking up the position, at the behest of the institution’s Board of Trustees. He was forced to establish this in court, as the University tried to deny that he’d ever been offered employment – just one of a stunning array of dirty tricks played upon him in a campaign of “Zionist repression” (p. 53).

Salaita’s ostensible “crime” was a series of tweets, sent from his personal Twitter account, critical of Israel’s so-called “Operation Protective Edge”, the attack on Gaza in mid-2014 in which over 2,000 civilians were killed. One said: “I wish all the fucking West Bank settlers would go missing” (p. 10). As he observes, the word, “missing” acquired a particular resonance in Israel at the time as it was used to refer to three teenaged boys from a settlement in Gush Etzion,

in the occupied Palestinian West Bank, who were kidnapped from a hitch-hiking stop and whose bodies were later found in a field near Hebron.

As Salaita recalls, “the Israeli government immediately blamed Hamas, which turned out not to be responsible, and facilitated one of the worst outbreaks of mob violence in recent Israeli history” (p 10). His ‘offending’ tweet came a week into this cynically engineered bout of nationalistic hysteria.

The murder of the three boys was an infamous crime, but there was – and remains – something obscene about the disproportionate political and media attention the incident generated, when the far greater number of young Palestinian lives destroyed or blighted by the occupation, its appurtenances and cruelties are met typically with comparative indifference. The former stood out as an aberration from a norm; the latter is the everyday grinding reality for a dispossessed people.

In Salaita’s own words, “I thought it a suitable moment to reflect on a fundamental Palestinian desire to end military occupation. I invoked the ‘go missing’ phrase because of its currency in that moment. I didn’t mean kidnap or murder”. But the tweet was to return to haunt him as it was one of those cited by the “sub-mediocre sycophants” (p. 195) who populate upper University administrative corridors as an excuse to ride roughshod over UIUC’s own rules, and the integrity of its American Indian Studies program, and fire him.

The ‘offence’ his tweets are supposed to have caused has to be seen in context. ‘Protective Edge’ saw Israel isolated in world public, media and political opinion as seldom before. It lent further impetus to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, which was by then identified by authorities in Israel as a strategic threat. We now know, thanks to a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, that foreign direct investment in Israel halved in 2014, with one of its co-authors, Israeli economist Dr Ronny Manos, attributing the sharp drop to fallout from the military onslaught on Gaza and “international boycotts” against Israel for “alleged violations of international law.”

Salaita’s “vocal support” for the academic boycott, a key component of BDS, tops his own list of “factors that contributed to my firing” (p. 48). As he remarks, BDS puts the wind up the parasitic class of corporate-friendly administrators now wrecking universities throughout the neo-liberal world, not merely for its Palestine advocacy but because it represents “grassroots organizing, faculty autonomy, antiracism, decolonization, systemic critique” (p. 56) – all supposedly prerogatives of academic freedom that somehow feel embarrassing in attempts to cosy up to rich donors.

There is also something intrinsically disobliging about Palestine advocacy to a still-dominant American narrative that waxes choleric when reminded of the genocidal war against the continent’s first nations that was a condition of its founding. “Palestine... is an anxiety, one whose existence ensures the survival of the American Indian” (p. 100). US support for Zionism is tendered “for reasons that eclipse geopolitics” (p. 100).

Similar observations could be made about Australia, which suppresses its Aboriginal population with ever-intensifying bureaucratic zeal, and where my own prominent advocacy of the academic boycott has given me a taste of the treatment meted out to Salaita. The “consummate disingenuity” (p. 123) that leads critics of Israeli government policies to be smeared as “antisemitic” is one experience we share. As is the Orwellian use by University managers of the word, “civility” to shut down dissension from an approved spectrum of views and modes of expression when tackling divisive issues on campus.

Earlier this year, University of Sydney management disgracefully connived in a libellous campaign against me by a hasbara organisation, the “Australasian Union of Jewish Students”, and instrumentalised the resulting hysteria to institute disciplinary proceedings, after a speech by a notorious apologist for Israeli militarism was interrupted by a noisy student demonstration. My “crime” was to intercede to prevent security guards from manhandling protesters in ways assessed by a senior medical practitioner as potentially highly dangerous.

In common with other campuses, including many in the US, the scholarly community includes many who profess to be ‘progressive except on Palestine’, and many more who keep their heads down or occasionally pop up to parrot management idiocies. But there are also a few doughty fighters for freedom and for human values in the governance of public affairs in general, and solidarity with peoples in struggle for rights and freedoms, in particular.

In my own case, the campaign worked, and the University had to declare that the charge of antisemitism was refuted. Unlike Salaita, I managed to keep my job. As he notes, “the kindness and generosity of the uncivilized [is] stunning... if this is incivility, then I eagerly accept my confinement to the dignity of the uncivil” (pp. 62-63).

Uncivil Rites rambles at times, and has the feeling of picking at different threads in parallel. It was forged in struggle, which took its author on a nonstop speaking tour as word spread of the injustice done to him, and its implications – with portions of the book written in haste or in discomfort while waiting for planes or travelling on trains.

The public outcry at his treatment took the backstairs-crawlers at UIUC by surprise. As Salaita concludes, “Suppression relies on the anxiety of its targets. It is sustainable... only in relation to our quiescence” (p. 188). He goes on to set out a stage-by-stage plan for effective campus organising around the academic boycott and related issues. Uncivil Rites deserves to be read as a classic of the movement, and its author’s courage and integrity widely emulated.

*Associate Professor Jake Lynch is Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney, and a member of Sydney Staff for BDS, which is affiliated to the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network.*

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## **Twinning proposal:**

### **University of Leeds– Al Quds University**

#### *James Dickins*

In May 2015, a proposal was put to the Leeds University Student Union that Leeds University should twin with Al Quds University in East Jerusalem. Despite receiving support from the School of English, the School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS), and the Dept. of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, the motion failed by the narrowest of margins to be endorsed by the Students Union - it received 15 out of 20 votes, when an endorsement required 16. It was therefore not at that stage taken forward to the relevant University committees for their consideration.

Given the narrowness of the defeat, it was decided to try again in the academic year 2015-16. There will accordingly now be a vote of the entire Leeds University student body in December 2015 over the twinning. If 1,500 students are in favour, the motion will go forward to the University authorities.

The twinning proposal covers the following:-

Formally twin with the Al Quds University Union and provide a physical recognition of the link alongside a dedicated webpage to the partnership

Lobby Leeds University to foster links such as in the field of academic research and on-line learning

Lobby Leeds University to provide an annual scholarship programme to Palestinian students.

Inform and educate our students of the challenges and barriers to educational access faced by Palestinian students.

Work on cultural and academic exchange programmes including:

- 1- Exchange of students for training at all levels, information, teaching materials, and scientific reports
- 2- Visiting lecturers and researchers
- 3- Fulfilment of joint research and educational projects and joint publications
- 4- Organising conferences, seminars, workshops, and courses

Education is enshrined in the human rights declaration, but the access we at Leeds enjoy in this respect is not available to Al Quds students.

Twinning provides a practical and effective route for extending our support for, and advancing our aims towards, promoting education to our members and the international student community.

Freedom of movement is severely restricted for Palestinian students. The 8 metre-high separation wall surrounding Al-Quds' main campus cuts it off from 36% of its students, and military checkpoints into Jerusalem involve up to 2 hour waits, which hugely affect students. Students are often deliberately targeted at the checkpoints.

Foreign Academics are unable to teach in Palestinian universities and the resulting burden placed on the academics at Al Quds serves to isolate the university from the wider academic community. Creating research links will help to improve this, but will also benefit Leeds - the Al Quds Human Rights Clinic is a leader in it's area.

Al Quds is also a pioneering University - they can boast the first Nanotechnology Research Centre and Medical School in Palestine and the first Open University programme in the Arab World.

Twinning would help create dialogue and interaction between Palestinian students and academics and their counterparts at Leeds, helping to raise cultural awareness, something Al Quds is committed to.

Exchange programs will enhance and further develop the personality of Al Quds and Leeds students and staff members.

In the more direct sense, the occupation of the region and raids on the university are attacks on students' right to education, and twinning is an affirmation of our support for a commitment to that right.

Both universities state access to education as one of their founding principles

## **Report on a British University's collaboration with the Arms and Surveillance Industry.**

### ***Editor***

Activists in Liverpool, having spent years on research, have produced an exhaustive report on the numerous and convoluted links between the University of Liverpool and companies that trade in arms and surveillance systems with oppressive regimes across the world. The report, which makes particular emphasis on companies complicit in the Israeli occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people, provides an invaluable guide to enable those wanting to research similar links with their own institutions. It's editor, Greg Dropkin, will be contributing to next month's Newsletter. In the mean-time, the report can be found at

<http://www.labournet.net/other/1510/livarmsall.pdf>

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### **Notices**

**BRICUP** is the **British Committee for the Universities of Palestine.**

We are always willing to help provide speakers for meetings. All such requests and any comments or suggestions concerning this Newsletter are welcome.

Email them to: [newsletter@bricup.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@bricup.org.uk)

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